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Houser

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(54) **TISSUE CUTTING CATHETER AND RF CUTTING METHOD**

(75) Inventor: **Russell A. Houser**, Livermore, CA (US)

(73) Assignee: **Russell A.**, Livermore, CA (US)

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Related U.S. Application Data

(62) Division of application No. 09/804,009, filed on Mar. 12, 2001, now Pat. No. 6,540,761, and a division of application No. 09/256,020, filed on Feb. 23, 1999, now Pat. No. 6,214,024, and a division of application No. 08/899,490, filed on Jul. 19, 1997, now Pat. No. 5,876,369, and a division of application No. 08/376,226, filed on Jan. 23, 1995, now Pat. No. 5,665,062.

(51) **Int. Cl.**⁷ **A61B 17/32**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **606/37; 128/898; 606/170; 604/22**

(58) **Field of Search** **128/898; 604/22; 606/32-49, 159, 167-171**

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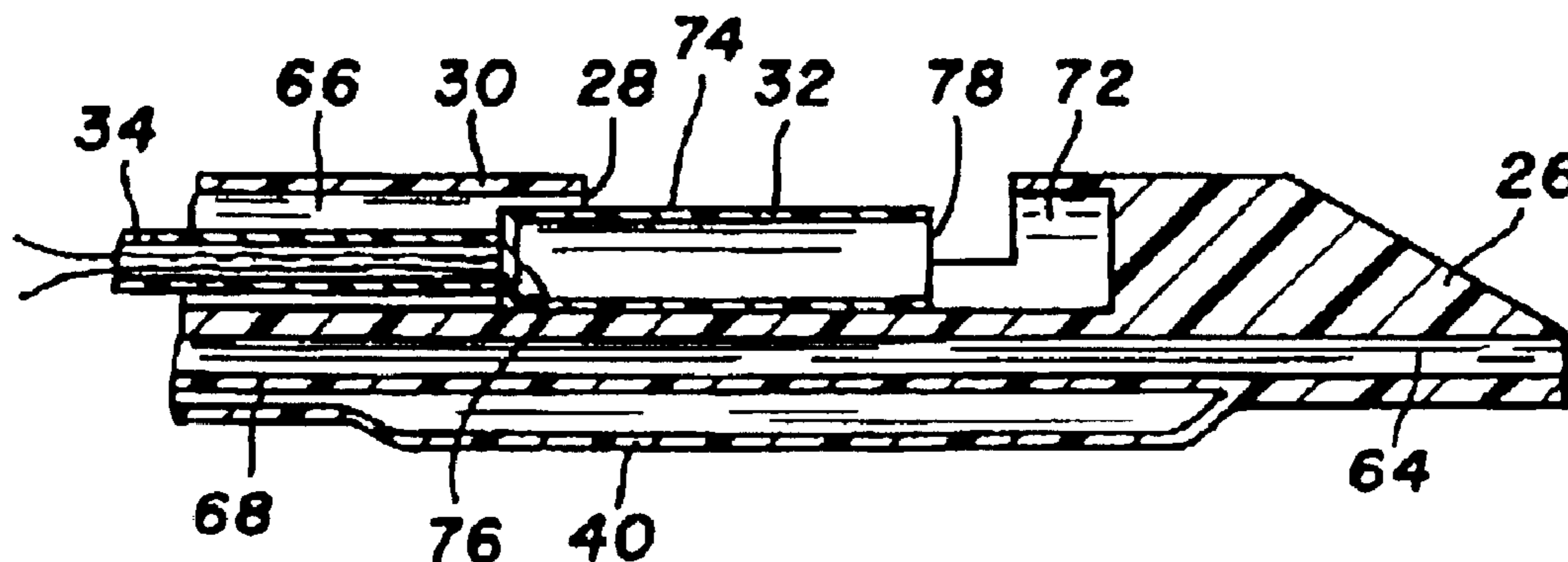
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Primary Examiner—Roy D Gibson
Assistant Examiner—Henry M Johnson, III

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A tissue cutting device includes a catheter with a window at its distal tip for admitting tissue into a catheter compartment. A cylindrical cartridge in the compartment has a cutting edge that supports an electrically conductive cutting element, e.g. a band or wire. The cutting element and adjacent tissue can be heated to a selected temperature by generating an electrical current through the cutting element. The catheter is maneuverable to position its distal end near the tissue to be cut. The catheter incorporates a dilatation balloon or other feature to urge the catheter against the tissue, so that at least part of the tissue may enter the compartment through the window. Then, the cartridge is manipulated from the catheter's proximal end to move the cutting edge across the window, cutting the tissue. According to alternative embodiments, the cartridge is either rotated or moved axially relative to the catheter and, in either event may be capable of closing the catheter window when the cut is complete. Further alternatives involve either placing an indifferent electrode on the patient and providing an RF signal via a single conductor to the cutting element for ohmic heating, or providing an RF (or a DC) current through the cutting element and two separate conductors for direct resistive heating of the cutting element.

15 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets



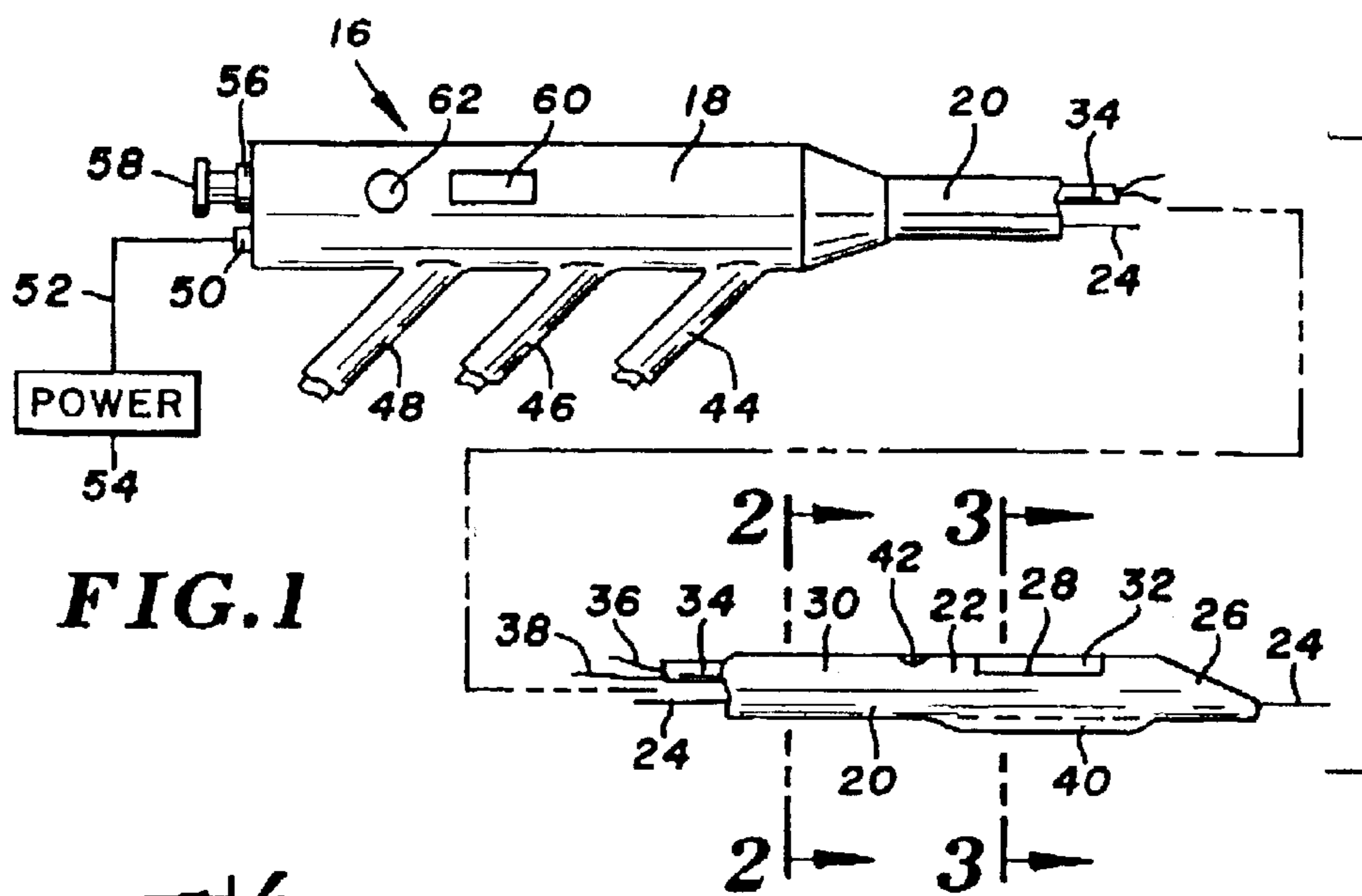


FIG. 1

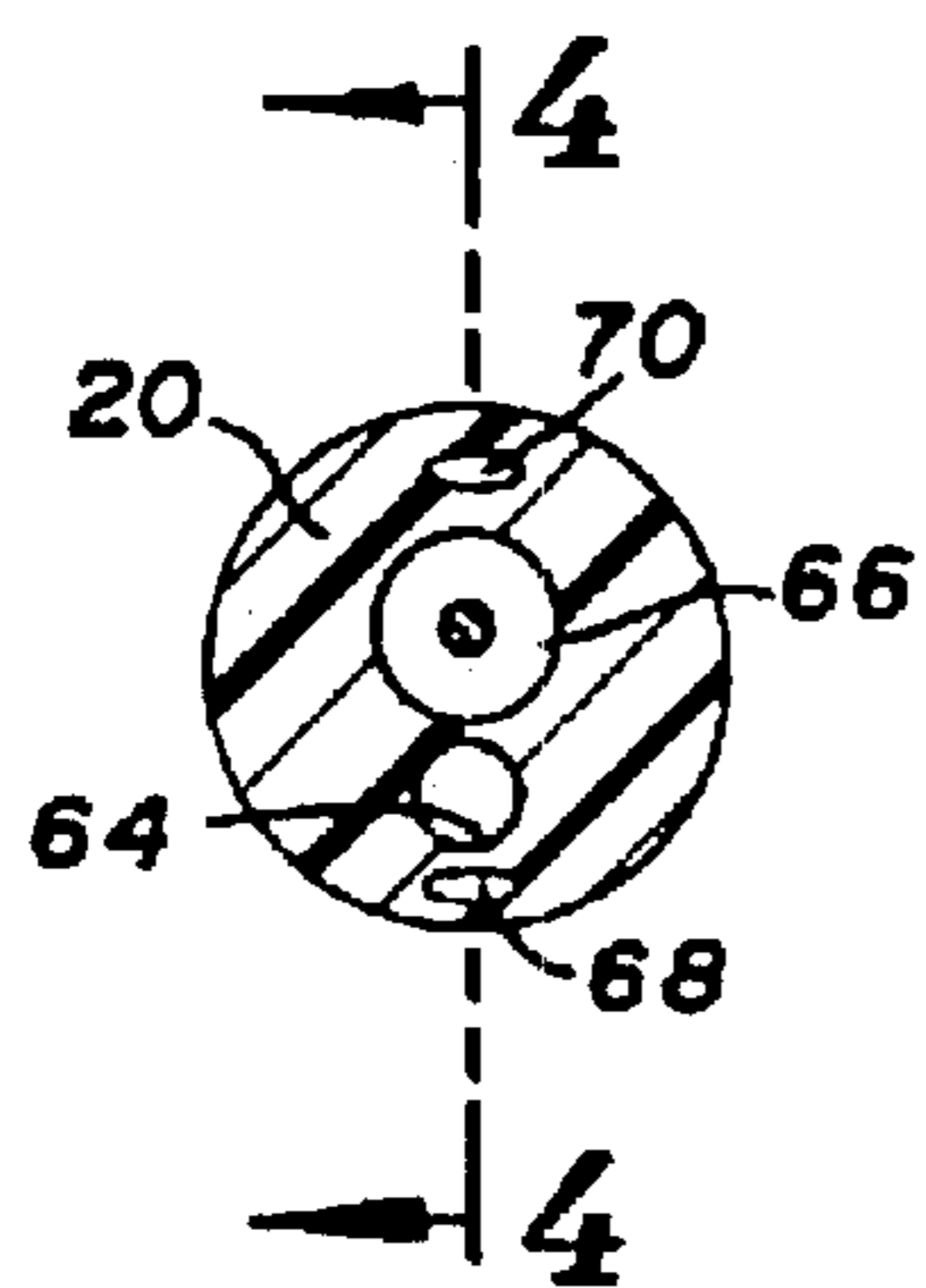


FIG. 2

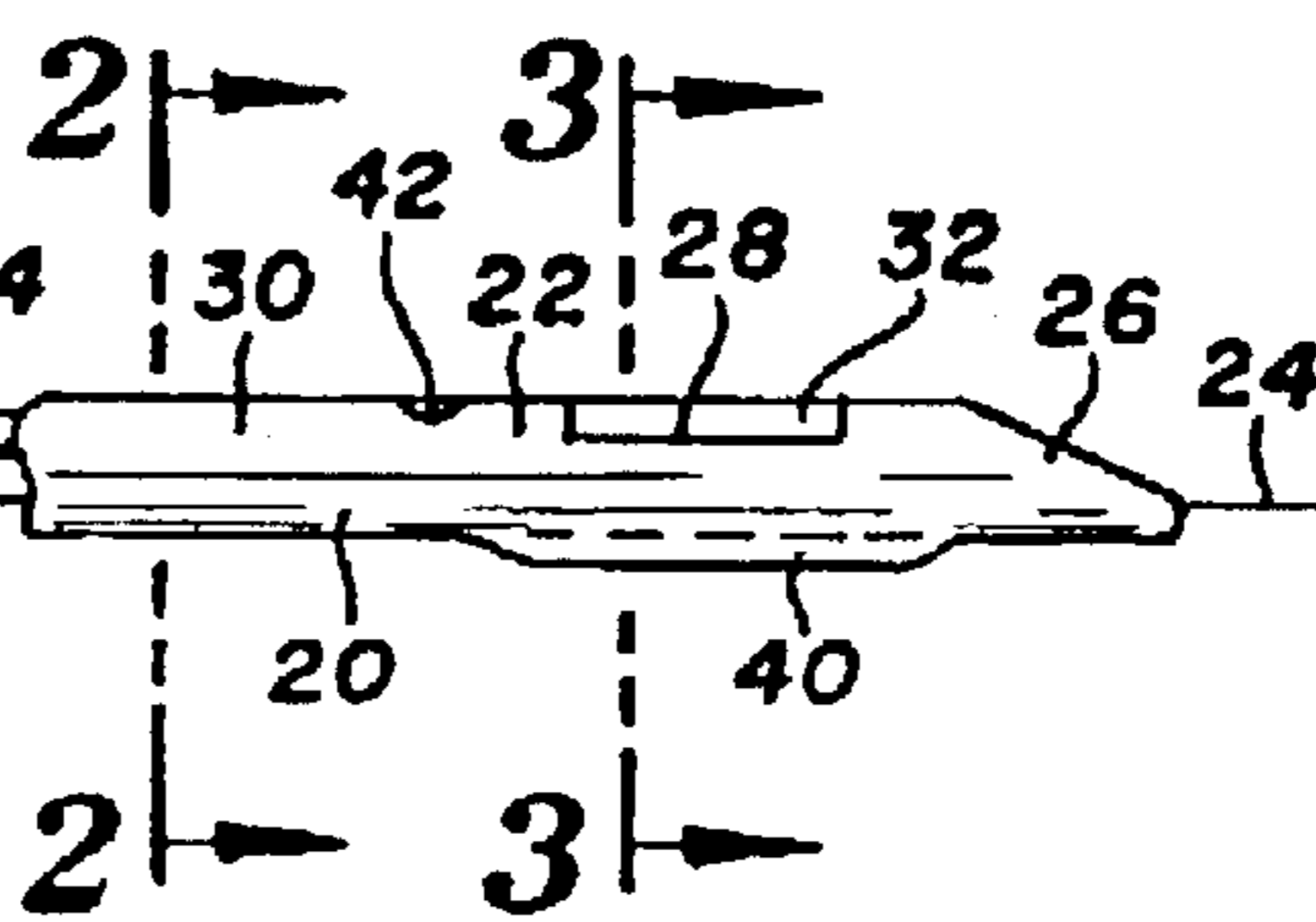


FIG. 3

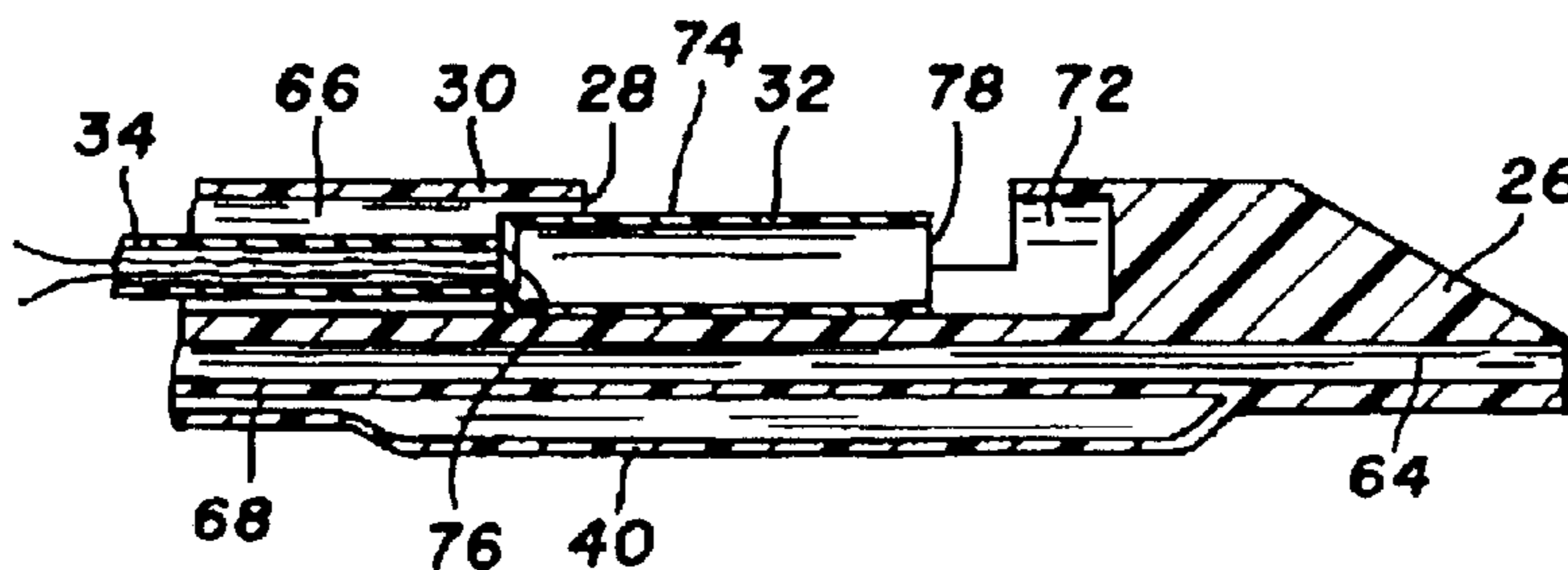


FIG. 4

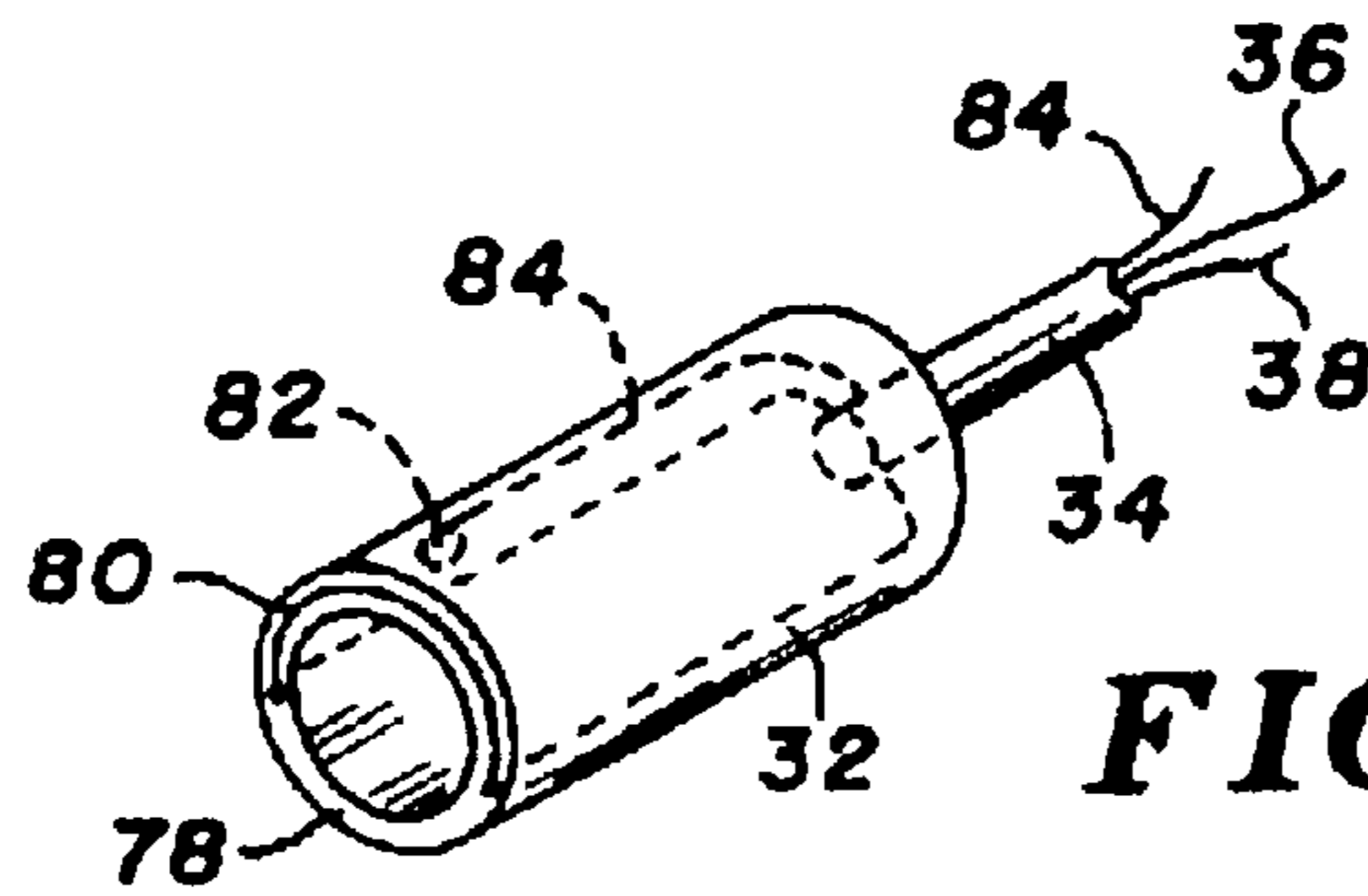


FIG. 5

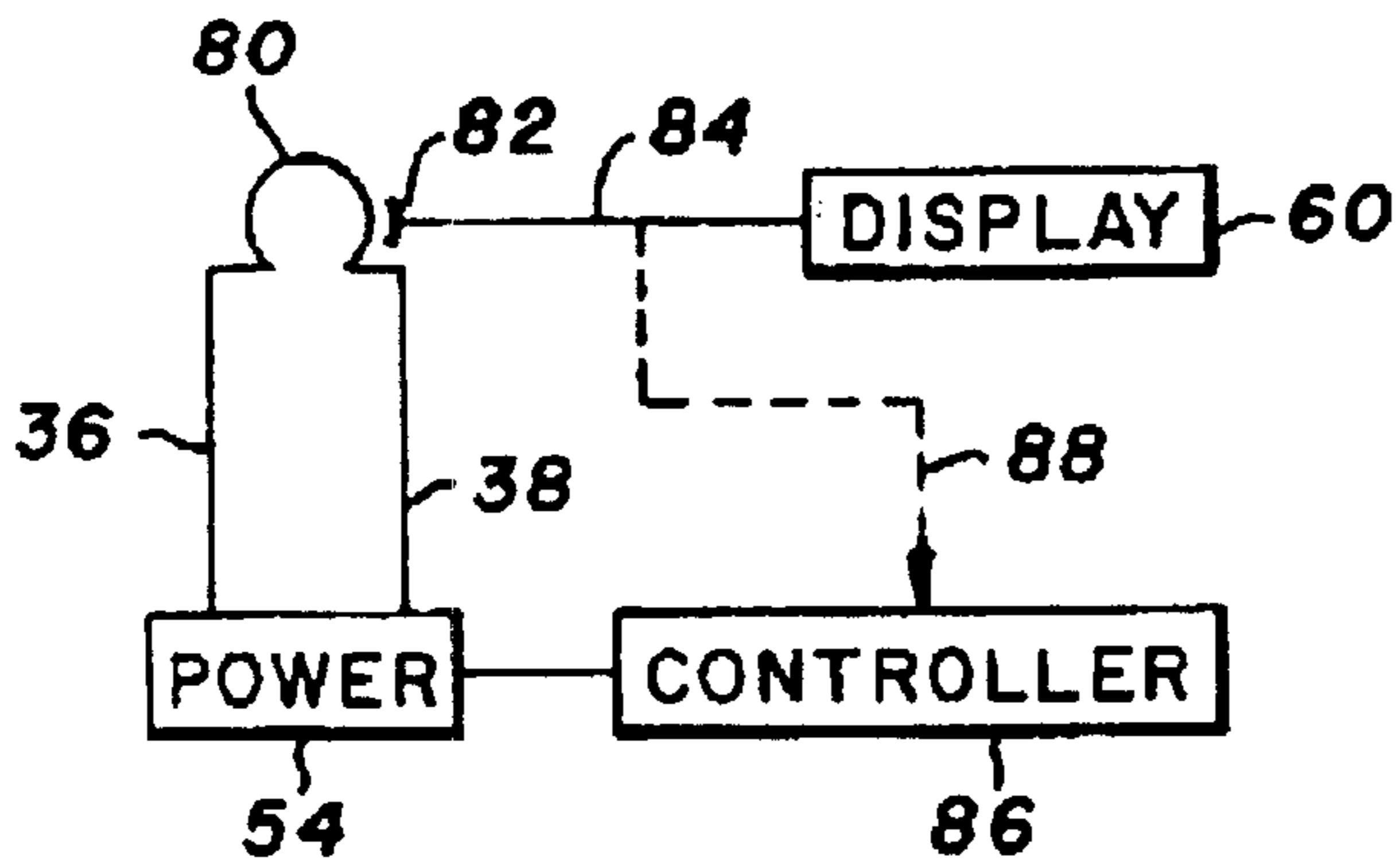


FIG. 6

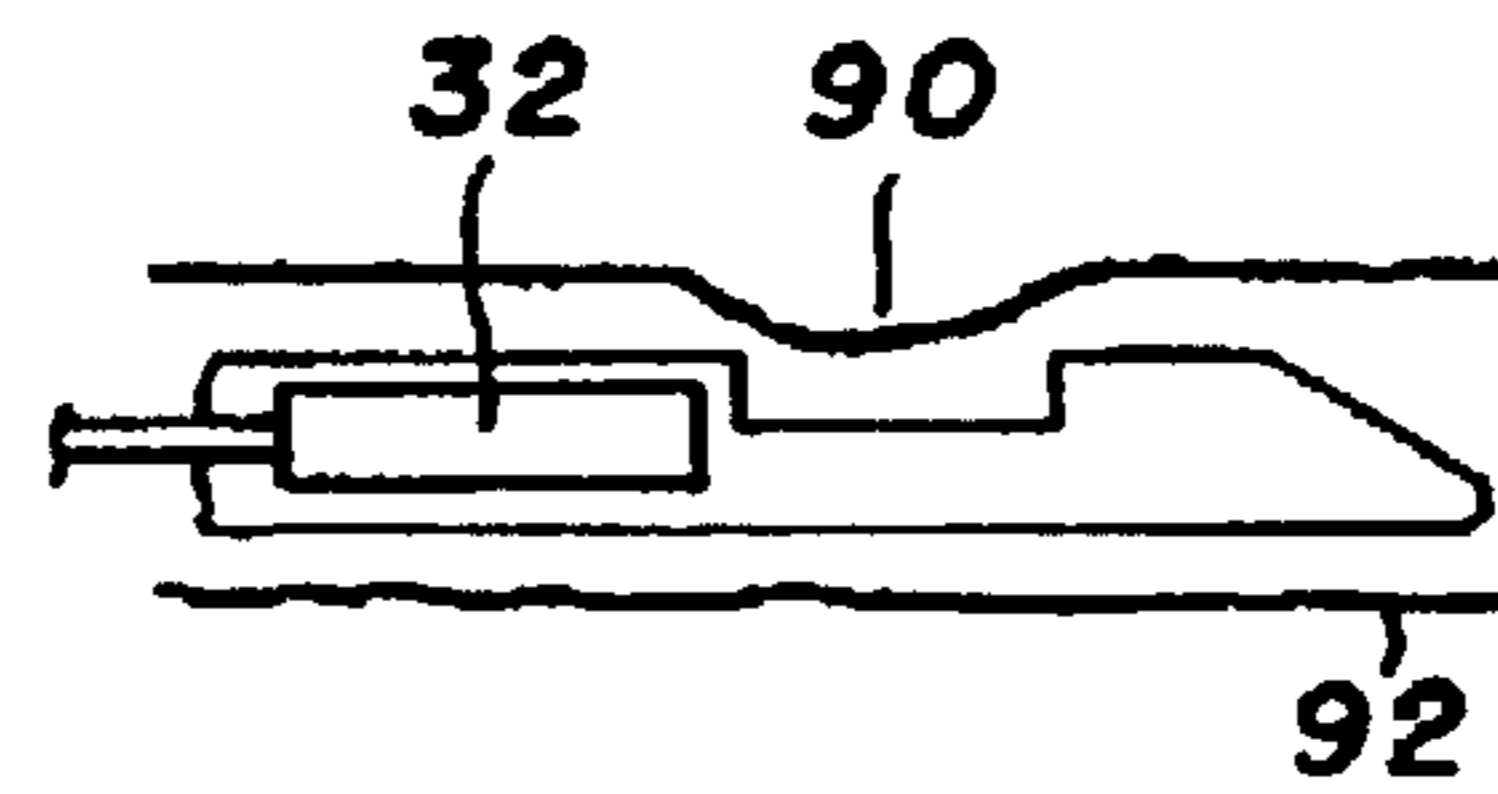


FIG. 7

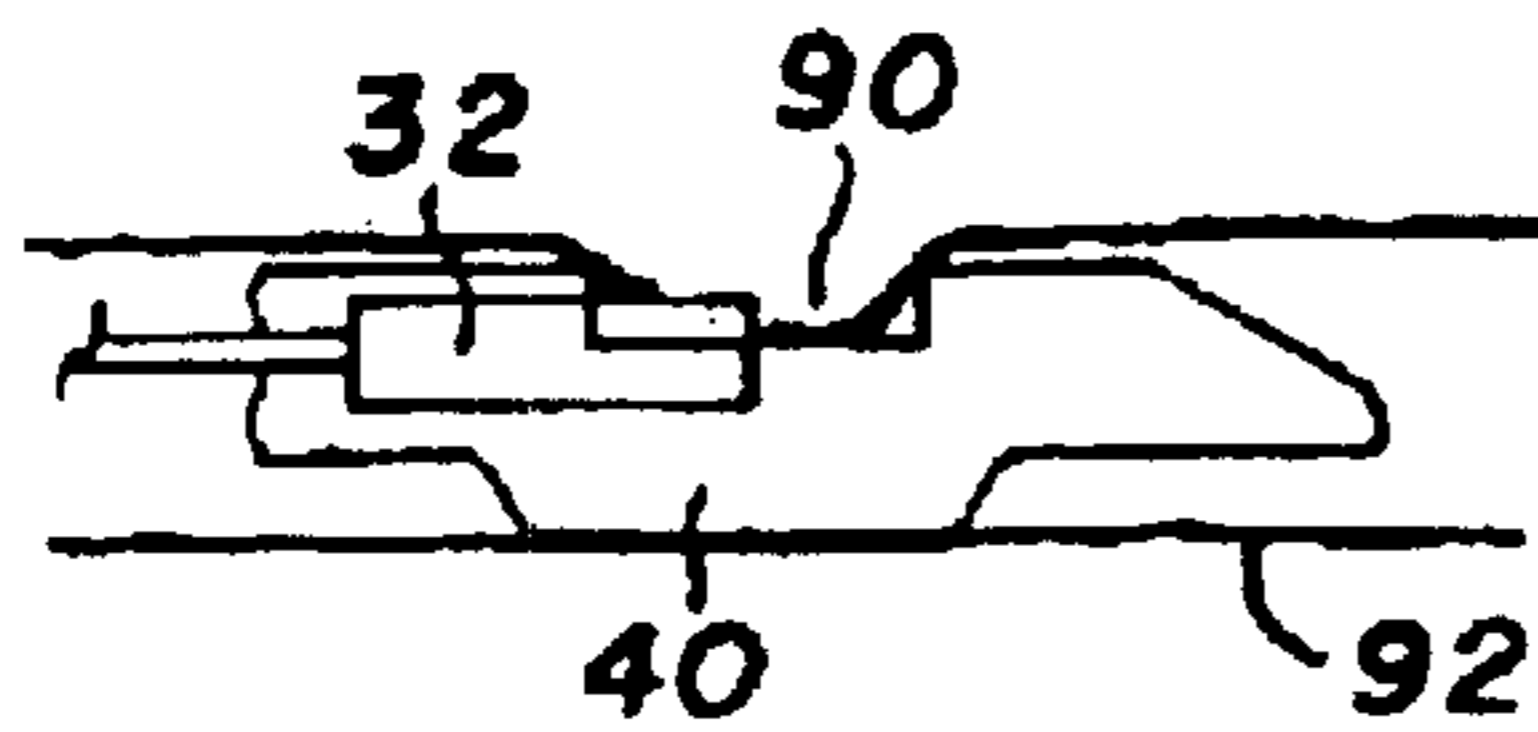


FIG. 8

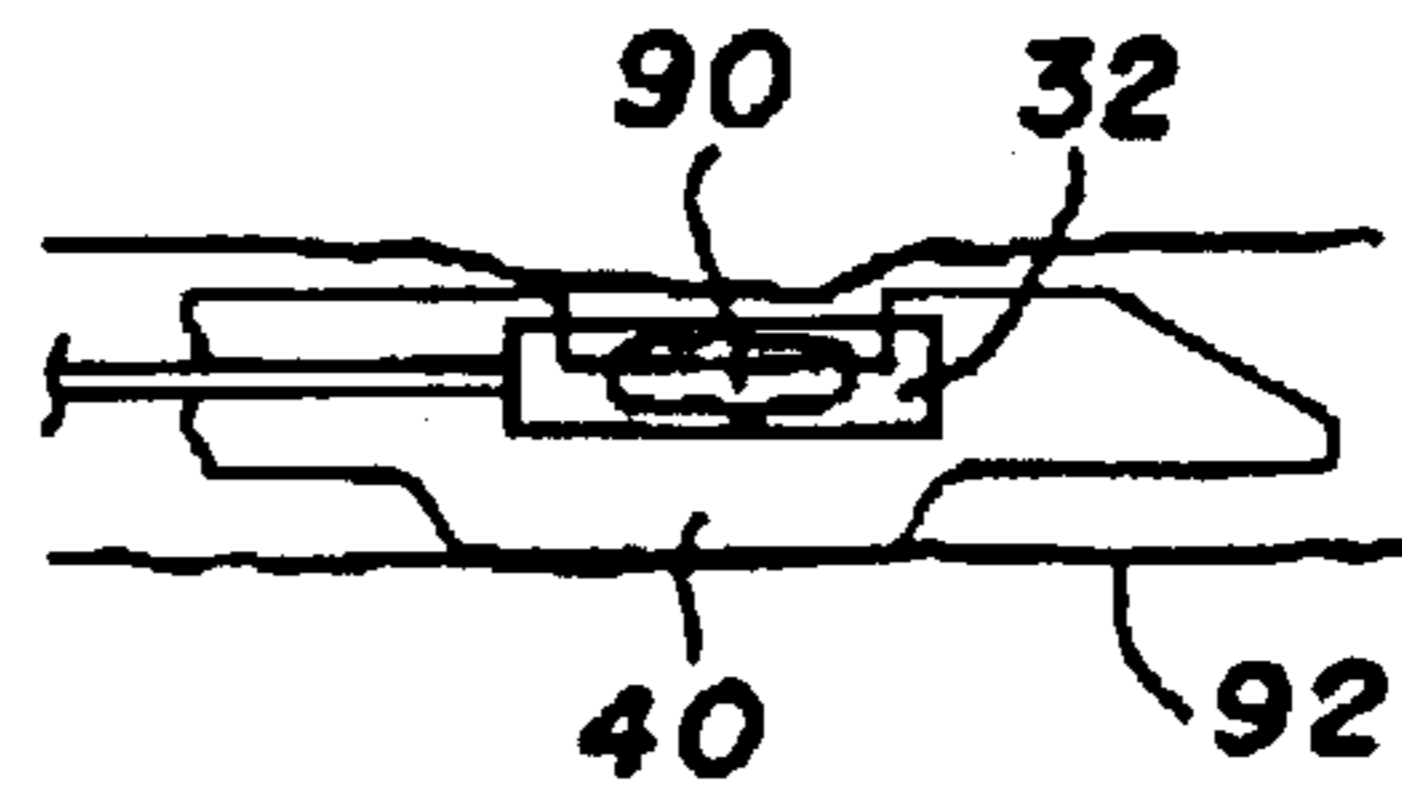


FIG. 9

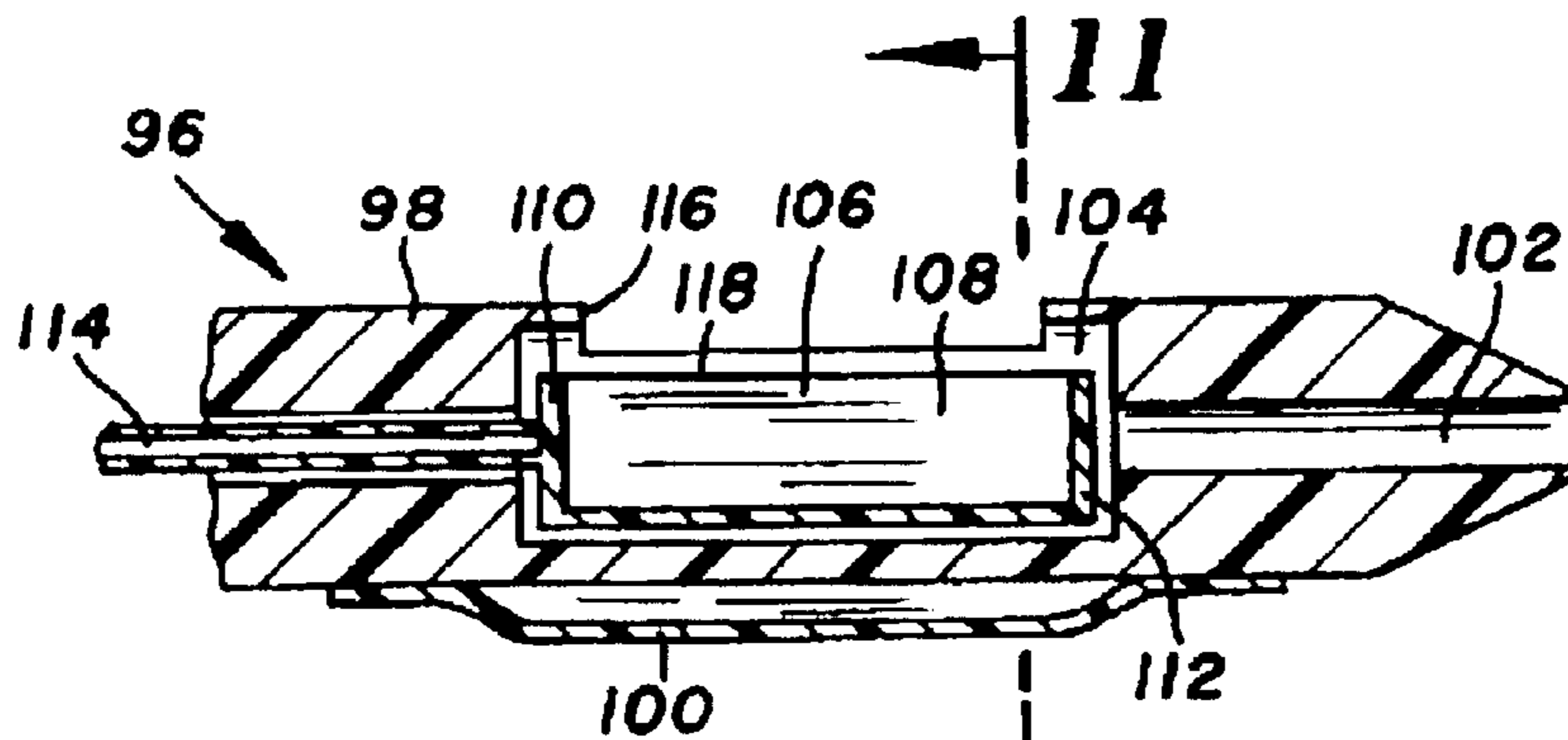


FIG. 10

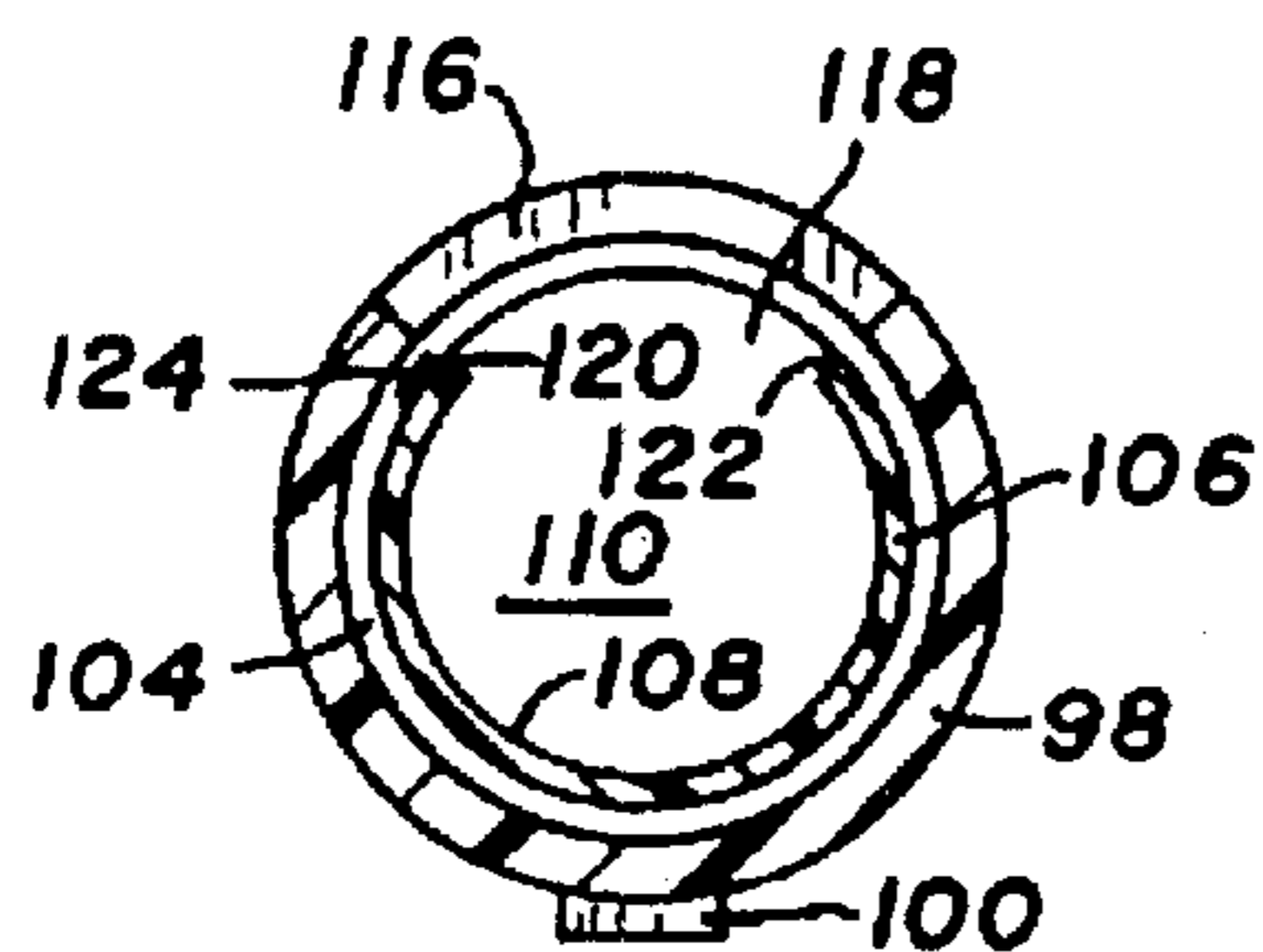


FIG. 11

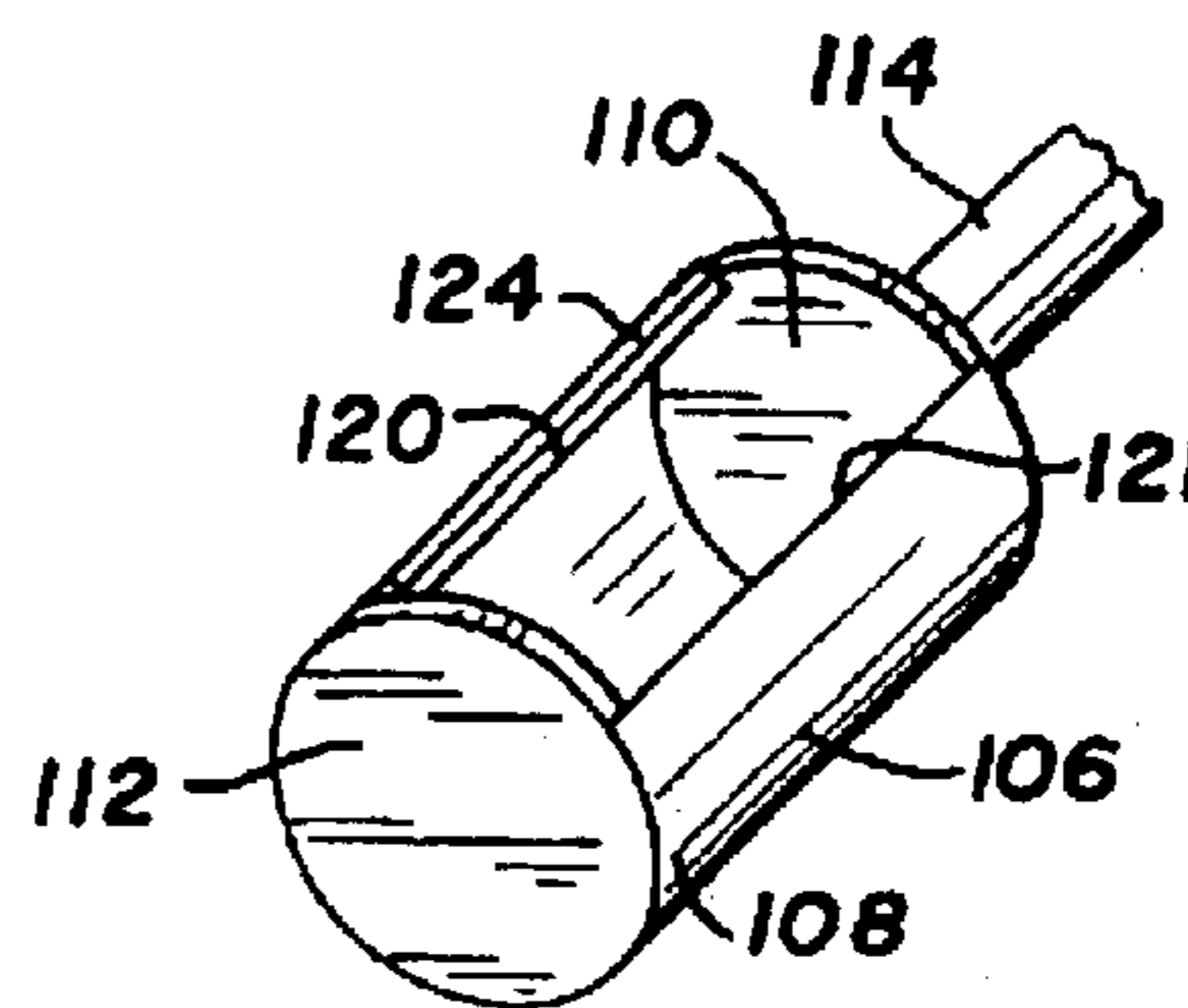


FIG. 12

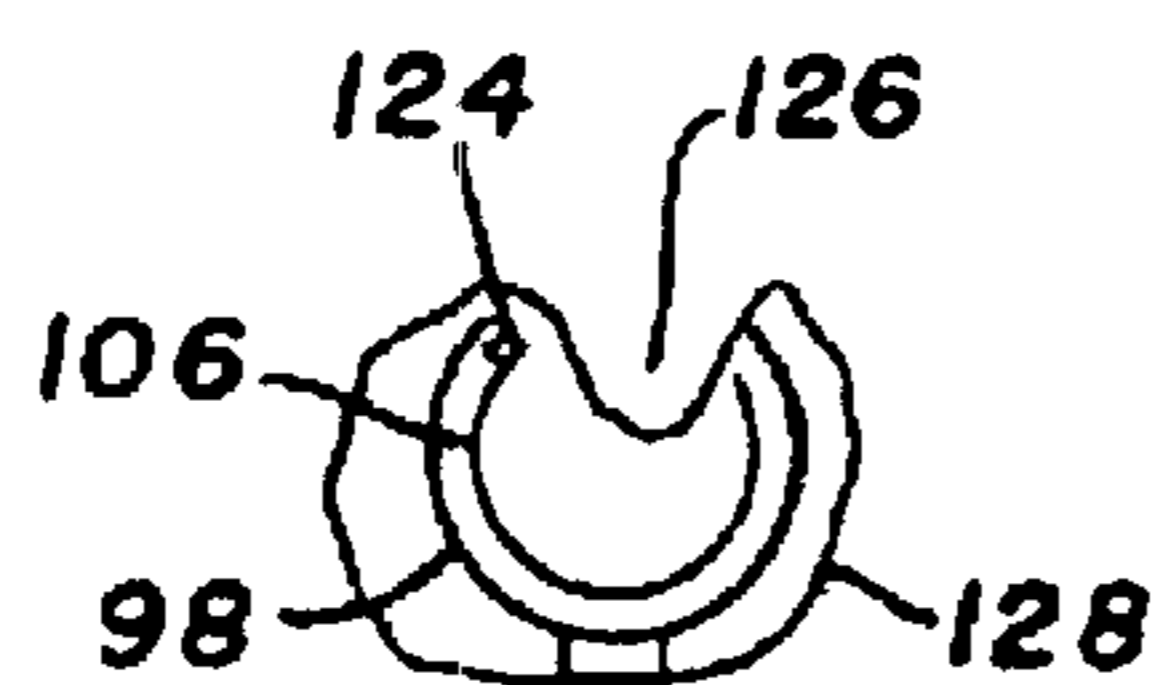


FIG. 13

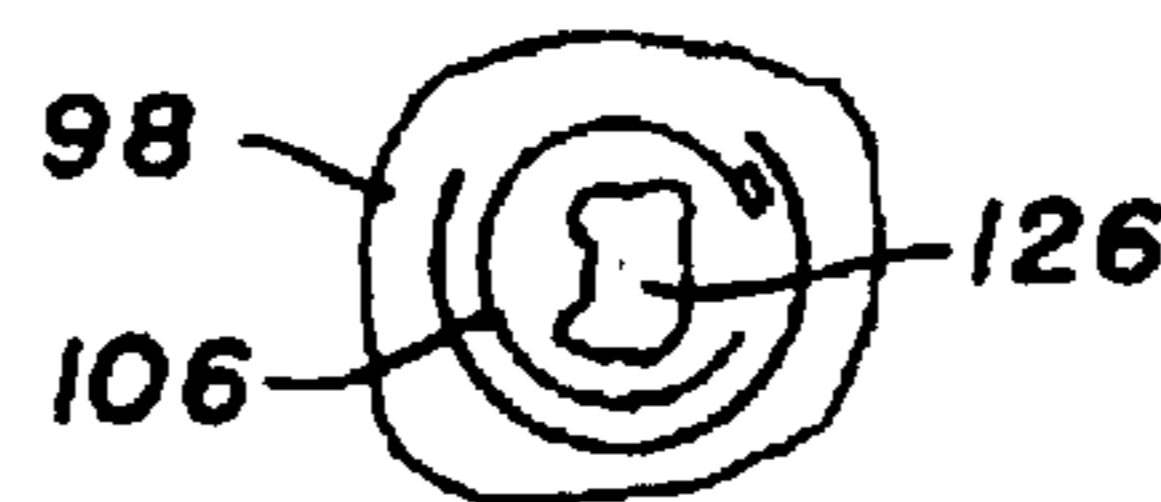


FIG. 14

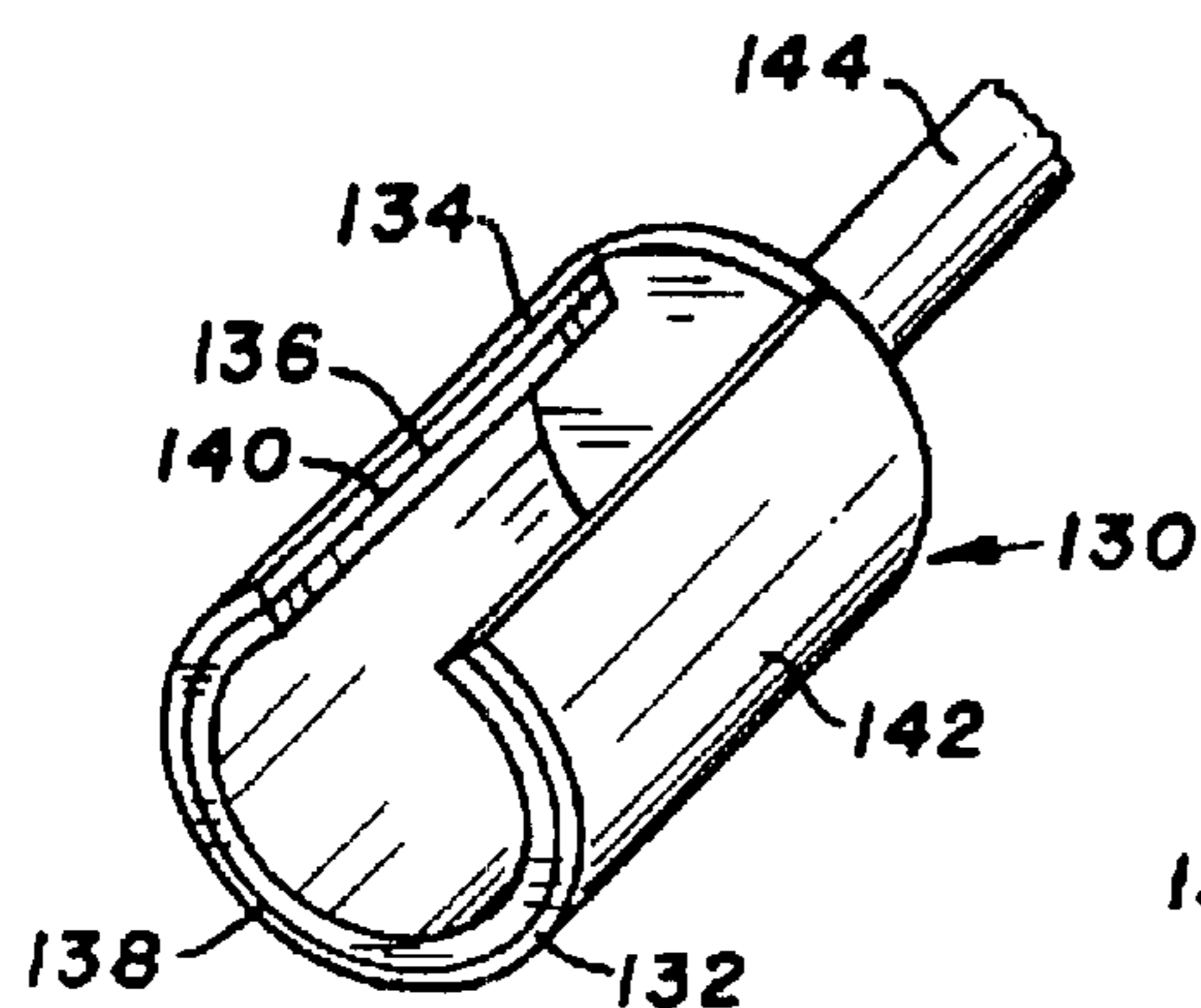


FIG. 15

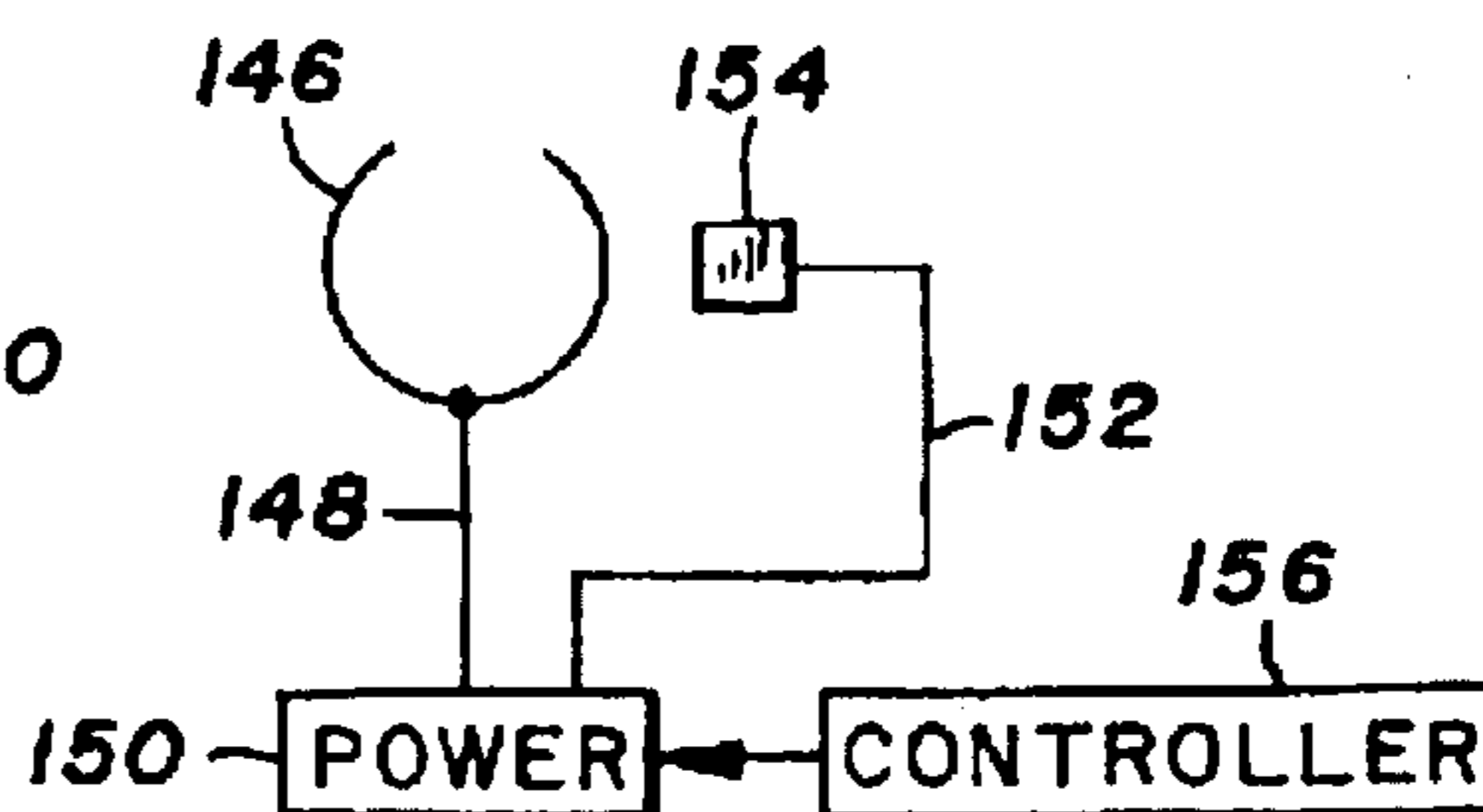


FIG. 16

TISSUE CUTTING CATHETER AND RF CUTTING METHOD

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a Division of Ser. No. 09/804,009 filed Mar. 12, 2001 and to be issued on Apr. 1, 2003 as U.S. Pat. No. 6,540,761; Division of Ser. No. 09/256,020, filed Feb. 23, 1999, U.S. Pat. No. 6,214,024; Division of Ser. No. 08/899,490 Jul. 19, 1997, U.S. Pat. No. 5,876,369, and a Division of Application Ser. No. 08/376,226 Jan. 23, 1995, U.S. Pat. No. 5,665,062.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to devices for removing obstructions from body lumens, and more particularly to catheters for removing atherosclerotic plaque and thrombotic occlusions from blood vessels.

Atherectomy catheters are known for their utility in removing atherosclerotic plaque and thrombotic occlusions from arteries. While intended mainly for use in the coronary arteries, such catheters may as well be used in peripheral vessels. Beyond coronary uses, such catheters can have neurological applications, e.g. removal of lesions in carotid arteries, gynecological use in recanalizing fallopian tubes, and a potential urological application for removal of benign prostate hyperplasia.

Atherectomy catheters have a variety of designs. According to one design, the catheter has a rounded or bullet shaped tip with an abrasive surface. At the treatment site, the tip is rotated at high speed and burrows through the occlusion. The resulting debris, typically in particulate form, is not captured by the device. Rather, it is allowed to flow to the capillary bed where it is absorbed. The device is most effective in abrading hardened (calcified) occlusions, with the intent being to produce particulate debris no larger than about 7 microns in diameter. When encountering softer occlusions, however, the device presents the risk of an occlusion breaking off during the atherectomy procedure, causing an acute and potentially life-threatening reclosure of the artery. The abrasive tip may inadvertently remove endothelium cells during catheter insertion, use or removal, thereby creating sites for potential lesions.

A second type of catheter employs a cartridge housed within the catheter, near the catheter distal tip. When the distal tip region is placed near the occlusion, plaque enters the cartridge through an opening or "cutting window". A cup-shaped blade then is rotated or oscillated at high speed, and advanced to cut and capture plaque that entered the cartridge. U.S. Pat. No. 5,312,425 (Evans); U.S. Pat. No. 5,087,265 (Summers); and U.S. Pat. No. 5,085,662 (Willard) disclose versions of atherectomy catheters with a movable blade or cartridge within a tissue collection volume near the catheter distal tip.

An example of an atherectomy catheter that depends on vaporization of plaque is found in U.S. Pat. No. 5,087,256 (Taylor). A dome-shaped head on the tip can be heated to temperatures in the range of 300–400 degrees C., for disintegrating plaque. U.S. Pat. No. 5,098,431 (Rydell) discloses a catheter in which an RF discharge between two spaced apart annular electrodes, electrosurgically cuts tissue to remove a blockage.

Conventional atherectomy catheters are limited principally to an axial cutting direction and subject to smooth cell muscle migration (restenosis) after treatment. Patients

treated with conventional atherectomy devices have restenosis rates of 30–40 percent within the six months following treatment.

Therefore, it is an object of the present invention to provide an atherectomy catheter with a cutting edge that achieves a finer, more accurate cutting of unwanted tissue, to reduce the risk of acute blockage due to the breaking off of an occlusion.

Another object is to provide a tissue cutting element for an atherectomy catheter that is effective in severing calcified and soft occlusions.

A further object is to provide a flexible atherectomy catheter that incorporates means for capturing tissue being severed, to ensure against the escape of such tissue into the blood stream.

Yet another object is to provide an atherectomy catheter with enhanced versatility, due to the incorporation of longitudinal and transverse (arcuate) tissue cutting motions.

Further, it is an object of the present invention to provide an atherectomy catheter and procedure tending to seal the region of the cut, thus tending to reduce the incidence of restenosis.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

To achieve these and other objects, there is provided a device for removing atheromas from a body lumen. The device includes an elongate catheter having a proximal end and a distal end. The catheter has a wall that defines a compartment within the catheter near its distal end, and a window is formed through the catheter wall to allow entry into the compartment. The catheter incorporates an electrically conductive tissue cutting element. A means is provided for generating an electrical current in the cutting element to heat the cutting element and adjacent tissue at least to a selected temperature above normal body temperature (i.e. 37 degrees C.). A carrier is mounted movably relative to the catheter, for supporting the cutting element proximate the window and for a controlled movement of the cutting element along and adjacent the window. The catheter is flexible and maneuverable to locate its distal tip within a body lumen and to place the window against a tissue wall segment of the body lumen to acquire tissue within the compartment. The cutting element, when heated and when undergoing the controlled movement, severs the acquired tissue.

There are several suitable approaches for generating the current necessary for cutting. At present, the most preferred approach involves a biocompatible cutting element (e.g. of platinum) subjected to RF energy in combination with an indifferent plate electrode on the patient's back. Application of the RF energy causes ohmic heating of tissue near the cutting element as current passes through the tissue.

As an alternative, RF energy can be applied to heat an electrically resistive cutting element formed of nickel or a nickel chromium alloy. In this approach, the cutting element is heated to a temperature sufficient to sever a lesion that comes into contact with the element. As a third and presently least preferred alternative, DC power is applied to heat an electrically resistive cutting element, again of nickel or a nickel chromium alloy. For biocompatibility, an insulative jacket or coating is applied to the nickel or nickel chromium cutting element.

The preferred cutting element is a flat band, having a thickness of about 0.015 inches and a substantially greater width. The band achieves a highly accurate and fine cut of

the tissue, considerably reducing the pulling and tearing of tissue as compared to the conventional oscillating or rotating blades. Unwanted tissue is severed more cleanly, reducing patient risk. Further, it is believed that the elevated temperatures of the band and adjacent tissue have a sealing or cauterizing effect along the region of the cut. This is believed to result in a substantial reduction in restenosis in the treated artery.

As an alternative to a flat band, the cutting element can be a fine wire having a diameter of about 0.030 inches or less to provide the cutting edge.

The carrier preferably includes a cartridge contained within the compartment. The cartridge can have an axially extended cartridge wall, a cartridge opening and a cutting edge along the cartridge opening for supporting the cutting element. A control means is coupled to the cartridge proximal end, and operable to selectively position and move the cartridge within the compartment, to provide the controlled movement of the cutting element. Preferably the cartridge wall is longer axially than the window, so that the cartridge can be positioned to substantially close the window and thus capture severed tissue. With tissue secured in this manner, there is no need for a suction device or other means to withdraw tissue proximally through the catheter immediately after it is cut. With no need to pay attention to a vacuum or suction means, the physician is able to direct more attention to the atherectomy procedure at hand.

Conversely, a vacuum means (or alternatively a plunger device and a diaphragm valve) may be provided if desired for removing severed tissue from the compartment, to allow cutting and removal of tissue at several locations during a single procedure.

There are several alternatives for supporting the cutting element. For example, the cutting edge can be the leading or distal edge of the cartridge, preferably but not necessarily annular. In this event, the cartridge is moved distally to provide the necessary controlled movement of the cutting element. Alternatively, the cutting edge can be an axial edge of the cartridge opening, in which event the cartridge is rotated about a longitudinal axis to move the cutting element in an arcuate path.

A preferred control means includes an elongate drive member, e.g. a rod, coil or tube, attached to the proximal end of the cartridge and extending proximally to a proximal end of the catheter. The member can be rotated, pushed or pulled at the catheter proximal end, to impart like motion to the cartridge.

Another aspect of the invention is a process for removing tissue from a body lumen, according to the following steps:

- a. providing, near a distal end of an elongate catheter, a compartment and a window to the compartment through a catheter wall, and an electrically conductive tissue cutting element mounted to the catheter for a controlled movement of the cutting element adjacent and along the window;
- b. inserting the catheter into a body lumen, and guiding the catheter to position the window against a tissue wall segment of the body lumen, thus to cause tissue to enter the compartment via the window and occupy the compartment;
- c. generating an electrical current in the cutting element to heat the cutting element and adjacent tissue at least to a selected temperature above normal body temperature, while causing the cutting element to undergo the controlled movement, thereby to sever the tissue occupying the compartment.

After the tissue is severed, the compartment can be closed to prevent egress of the severed tissue. The controlled movement of the cutting element can be one of two alternatives: substantially linear and axial with respect to the catheter, or arcuate about an axis running longitudinally of the catheter.

Thus in accordance with the present invention, there is provided an atherectomy device and procedure suitable for treating soft occlusions and calcified occlusions alike, with clean and accurate cutting that reduces the risk of tissue tearing and escaping into the blood vessel under treatment. The catheter is versatile, due to its flexibility for traversing tortuous vessels and for the ability to cut in either an arcuate or axial path. The application of heat is concentrated along the region of the cut, i.e. the cutting element and adjacent tissue, reducing the required cutting force, increasing cutting accuracy and tending to cauterize or seal the region of the cut, thus tending to substantially prevent restenosis.

IN THE DRAWINGS

For a further understanding of the above features and advantages, reference is made to the following detailed description and to the drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is an elevation of an atherectomy device constructed in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a sectional view taken along the line 2—2 in FIG. 1;

FIGS. 3 and 4 are sectional views taken along the lines 3—3 in FIGS. 1 and 4—4 in FIG. 2;

FIG. 5 is a perspective view of a tissue retaining cartridge employed in the device;

FIG. 6 is a schematic view illustrating circuitry for providing an electrical current through a mounted heating element on the cartridge;

FIGS. 7—9 are diagrammatic views illustrating use of the device;

FIG. 10 is an elevational view of the distal end region of an alternative atherectomy device constructed according to the invention;

FIG. 11 is a sectional view taken along the line 11—11 in FIG. 10;

FIG. 12 is a perspective view of a tissue retaining cartridge used in the device of FIG. 10;

FIGS. 13 and 14 diagrammatically illustrate use of the device of FIG. 9;

FIG. 15 is a three-dimensional illustration of an alternative embodiment cartridge; and

FIG. 16 is a schematic view of an alternative circuit for heating the cutting element.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Turning now to the drawings, there is shown in FIG. 1 an atherectomy device 16 for removing unwanted tissue from body lumens, more particularly blood vessels. The device includes a control housing or handle 18, and an elongate and pliable catheter 20 connected at its proximal end to the handle.

Catheter 20 is formed of a biocompatible polymer such as Pebax (brand name) polyether block amides, Pellethane (brand name) polyurethane or polyimide, and can have an outside diameter in the range of 3 Fr. (1 mm) to 8 Fr. (2.7 mm) or larger. Catheter 20 includes several lumens that run axially from handle 18 to a distal end region 22. A guidewire

24, contained within one of the lumens, extends proximally beyond handle 18 and distally beyond a tapered distal tip 26 of the catheter. Further lumens are provided in the catheter, for delivery of contrast fluid or treatment fluid to the distal end region, and for balloon inflation. While not shown, a braided or other filament structure can be embedded into the catheter body to enhance torque transmission, if desired.

A window 28 is formed through a wall 30 of the catheter along the distal end region. Window 28 is elongate in the axial direction and extends along about forty percent of the circumference of catheter wall 30. A cartridge or cutting sleeve 32 is contained within catheter 20. The cartridge is shown adjacent and along window 28, but is movable axially relative to the catheter. This enables a proximal retraction of the catheter from window 28, to open the window whereby the catheter can acquire tissue. An elongate drive rod 34, contained within a lumen of catheter 20, is coupled to the proximal end of cartridge 32 and extends proximally through the catheter and into handle 18.

Drive rod 34 is formed of an electrically insulative material, e.g. a PTFE coated wire coil or spiral wrapped polyimide. The drive rod has a high degree of bending elasticity to permit its movement (with the remainder of catheter 20) along serpentine passages toward an intended treatment site. At the same time, drive rod 34 is sufficiently rigid in the axial direction to permit controlling the cartridge axial position by manipulating the drive rod at its proximal end. Drive rod 34 is constructed of an electrically insulated material. A pair of conductors 36 and 38, preferably polyimide jacketed copper or copper-clad steel wires, are bonded to the drive rod and electrically isolated from one another. Conductors 36 and 38 extend along the entire catheter length to control housing 18.

A dilatation balloon 40 is formed to extend axially along distal end region 22, axially aligned with window 28 but also spaced apart angularly 180 degrees, i.e. on the opposite side of the catheter from the window. Balloon 40 is inflated using a fluid supplied to the balloon under pressure via a lumen of catheter 20.

A fluid port 42 admits contrast or treatment fluids in the region just proximally of window 28, while such fluids can be administered distally of the window via the guidewire lumen.

Control housing 18 includes three branches for coupling two sources of fluid (not shown): a branch 44 for balloon inflation, and two branches 46 and 48 for delivery of contrast fluids or treatment fluids such as heparin. At the proximal end of the control housing is a connector 50 with two electrically independent paths coupled to conductors 36 and 38, respectively. A line 52 (e.g. coaxial) removably electrically couples connector 50 to a power supply 54. Power supply 54 preferably is an RF source, but can be a DC source as well. Also mounted at the housing proximal end are a fitting 56 and a control knob 58. Knob 58, coupled to the proximal end of drive rod 34, is movable axially relative to fitting 56, to control the axial position of cartridge 32.

A display 60 (e.g. LED) indicates the temperature of a cutting element mounted to the cartridge. A temperature control 62 adjusts the current through the cutting element, thus to set the cutting element temperature.

FIG. 2 shows several lumens running through the catheter, including a guidewire lumen 64 that also can be used to administer contrast and treatment fluids. A control lumen 66 accommodates drive rod 34. Further lumens include a balloon inflation lumen 68 and an upper infusion lumen 70 for providing fluids to fluid port 42.

As seen in FIGS. 3 and 4, control lumen 66 along the distal end region forms a compartment 72 to accommodate cartridge 32. The compartment extends distally beyond window 28 a slight distance, and extends proximally of the window a sufficient amount to allow cartridge retraction, i.e. placing the complete cartridge proximally of the window.

Cartridge 32 is cylindrical, having an axial wall 74 and a disk-shaped proximal wall 76. As seen in FIG. 5, cartridge 32 is open at its distal end to provide a circular cutting edge 78. A tissue cut element, more particularly a fine, flat band 80, is mounted to the cutting edge to form an arc. Band 80 need not circumscribe the cutting edge, but should extend a sufficient amount to span window 28. Band 80 has a thickness of about 0.015 inches, and is formed of nickel or a nickel chromium alloy coated for biocompatibility. Alternatively (in an indifferent electrode approach discussed below) the band can be formed of platinum or another electrically conductive and body compatible material. The band is heated when subject to an electrical current. As an alternative to the band, the cutting element can be a wire with a diameter of at most 0.030 inches.

The polymer forming cartridge 32 can be blended with barium sulphate, bismuth trioxide or another suitable radio-paque material to facilitate fluoroscopic observation of the cartridge position before and during tissue removal. Radio-paque markers also may be placed along the cartridge cutting edge and on corresponding (distal and proximal, or intermediate) edges of the window. Along with aiding accurate positioning, these markers are useful in confirming when the cartridge is closed after cutting.

Conductors 36 and 38 are coupled to opposite ends of cutting element 80. As indicated in broken lines, conductors 36 and 38 are embedded in axial wall 74 which, like the drive rod, is electrically insulative. A thermocouple 82 can be mounted to the cartridge near cutting edge 78 and preferably bonded to cutting element 80, to monitor the cutting element temperature. Conductors 84, embedded in the cartridge and the drive rod, permit the cutting element temperature to be monitored from control housing 18. Alternatively, thermistors can be used to sense temperature. Further, for a resistive cutting element (i.e. nickel or nickel chromium) a characteristic dependence of resistance upon temperature can be used to monitor the cutting element temperature.

Tissue is cut by advancing cartridge 32 distally from the retracted position, with cutting element 80 and adjacent tissue maintained at at least a predetermined temperature above body temperature. A circuit for heating the cutting element and tissue is schematically illustrated in FIG. 6. A controller 86 adjusts power from supply 54 as required, for generating current through cutting element 80 in an amount selected to heat the cutting element to the predetermined temperature. Thermocouple 82 senses the temperature and provides the corresponding temperature reading at display 60. If the display indicates a need to increase or reduce the temperature, controller 86 is adjusted to alter the current accordingly. A broken line at 88 indicates that if desired, the output of thermocouple 82 can be employed to automatically adjust the cutting element current.

The use of device 16 to remove unwanted tissue is shown in FIGS. 7-9, where catheter 20 has been either steered or moved over guidewire 24 to a treatment position near a lesion 90 in a coronary artery. Catheter 20 is manipulated from housing 18 to axially and angularly align the catheter and lesion 90, so that window 28 faces the lesion (FIG. 7). At this point, dilatation fluid is supplied to expand balloon

40 against an arterial wall **92** opposite the lesion (e.g. as in aforementioned U.S. Pat. No. 5,085,662). Balloon dilatation drives the catheter distal end upward as viewed in FIGS. 7–9, forcing the catheter against the arterial wall about lesion **90** and causing at least a portion of the lesion to enter compartment **72** through window **28**.

With tissue thus acquired, cartridge **32** is advanced distally from the retracted position, while cutting element **80** is maintained at the selected temperature, from 50–600 degrees C. and more preferably 50–400 degrees C. This heating of the wire and adjacent tissue considerably enhances the cutting of tissue. Moreover, the heating has a cauterizing effect at the region of the cut and thus tends to seal the wound almost immediately after cutting, to significantly reduce smooth cell muscle migration or restenosis after treatment. The minute filament results in a precise, well defined cutting path that minimizes stretching and tearing of tissue. Accordingly, cutting element is effective in severing soft tissue as well as calcified or hardened tissue. This minimizes the risk of tissue fragmenting into particles or pieces that escape into the bloodstream.

Cartridge **32** is advanced until cutting edge **78** is distally of window **28** (FIG. 9), to completely acquire severed tissue within the cartridge. During or following the cut, a treatment fluid may be administered through lumens **64** and **70**. After balloon deflation, the cartridge can be proximally withdrawn to remove the severed tissue.

In addition to the cauterizing/sealing effect, a salient feature of the invention is the continuity of axial wall **74**, which closes window **28** when the cartridge is completely advanced. This insures that severed tissue remains captured within compartment **72** as the catheter is withdrawn, thus to eliminate the risk that severed tissue will enter the bloodstream.

FIG. 10 illustrates, in axial (longitudinal) section, the distal end region of an alternative device **96**. This device differs from device **16** in several respects concerning primarily the catheter distal end, but also as to the manner of controlling the cartridge. A catheter **98** of device **96** has flexible band **100** along its distal end in lieu of a dilatation balloon. Band **100** can be flexed radially away from the catheter and, upon contacting an artery, drives the catheter toward the opposite end of the artery. An example of such band and its control is found in U.S. Pat. No. 5,087,265 (Summers).

A single, central lumen **102** accommodates the guidewire and is enlarged to provide a compartment **104**. The compartment accommodates a cartridge **106** having an axially extended wall **108**, a proximal end wall **110** and a distal end wall **112**. A drive tube **114**, connected to the proximal end wall, is manipulated at the housing to selectively position cartridge **106**.

Drive tube **114** is used to rotate cartridge **106** about a longitudinal axis, rather than to move the cartridge axially. Consequently, while it requires less axial stiffness than drive rod **34**, drive tube **114** must be resistant to torsional bending to apply the necessary torque to rotate cartridge **106**. Also because of the lack of axial movement, compartment **104** need not extend proximally beyond window **116** to accommodate the cartridge length. As seen in FIGS. 11 and 12, cartridge wall **108** is open along a portion of its circumference, to provide an arcuate cartridge opening **118** defined by end walls **110** and **112** and axial edges **120** and **121**. Axial edge **120** provides the cutting edge, and supports a linear cutting element **124**. Cutting element **124** is flat and thin (e.g. 0.015 inches thick), with a rectangular profile, to provide a lower profile cutting edge as compared to a wire.

FIGS. 13 and 14 illustrate the use of catheter **98** to remove a lesion **126** from an artery **128**. The catheter is positioned to axially align window **116** with lesion **126**, and further to angularly align the window and lesion. A control knob (not shown but similar to knob **58**) is turned rather than pushed or pulled, to angularly align cartridge **106** such that opening **118** coincides with window **116** (FIG. 13). At this point, band **100** is flexed to urge the catheter upwardly against the arterial wall whereby a portion of lesion **126** enters compartment **104**.

At this point, the knob is turned to rotate cartridge **106** clockwise as viewed in FIG. 13 while cutting element **124** is heated, thus to progressively cut the lesion. Cartridge rotation continues until cutting edge **120** is carried beyond the clockwise edge of window **116**, which closes the window and captures acquired tissue. Then, catheter **98** is proximally withdrawn to remove captured tissue, or a plunger is used to remove tissue from the cartridge.

FIG. 15 illustrates an alternative embodiment cartridge **130** having an axial wall that is open at the distal end and along part of its circumference to define two cutting edges **132** and **134**. A continuous wire **136** (0.030 inch diameter) is mounted to the cartridge and shaped to provide an arcuate segment **138** mounted to cutting edge **132**, and a linear segment **140** along axial cutting edge **134**. Accordingly, cartridge **130** can be used to effect axial cutting and arcuate cutting. Cartridge wall **142** is continuous over at least sixty percent of its circumference to enable axial and angular positioning that closes the associated catheter window, to insure capture of severed tissue. Drive member **144** can be a tube, rod or coil and has sufficient axial and torsional rigidity to impart axial and rotational movement to the cartridge.

FIG. 16 illustrates an alternative circuit for heating an arcuate cutting element **146**. A conductor **148** connects the cutting element with an RF power supply **150**. A second conductor **152** couples the power supply and an indifferent electrode **154**. The indifferent electrode preferably is an electrode plate, typically applied to the back of the patient. The power supply provides an RF signal to the cutting element via conductor **148**. The signal returns to the power supply via conductor **152**. Between cutting element **146** and indifferent electrode **154**, current flows through body tissue. Consequently, ohmic heating of tissue is the primary factor in raising the temperature of tissue adjacent the cutting element to the predetermined or desired level. Cutting element **146** preferably is platinum, for high biocompatibility and electrical conductivity. Accordingly cutting element heating from the current, while present to a degree, is slight compared to the ohmic heating effect. A controller **156** governs power supply **150** to provide the appropriate current in cutting element **146**. While not shown in FIG. 16, a thermocouple or other sensing element can be mounted at the cutting element, to sense the temperature of the cutting element and adjacent tissue, and provide feedback to controller **156**. As noted above, this approach (highly conductive cutting element and indifferent electrode) is presently the most preferred.

While the disclosure has focused on the treatment of coronary arteries, it is to be appreciated that devices in accordance with the present invention can be used to treat peripheral arteries and other vessels. These principles further can be applied in constructing and utilizing devices in neurology for removal of lesions in the carotid arteries, in gynecology for recanalization of Fallopian tubes, and in urology for removal of benign prostrate hyperplasia. The heating of the cutting element and adjacent tissue provides

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a fine, accurate cut to sever tissue at minimal risk of forming fragments, and provides a sealing action believed to reduce the incidence of restenosis. The cartridge can be either rotated or moved axially of the catheter, for greater versatility in severing unwanted tissue. After the cut, the cartridge completely closes the tissue-admitting window of the catheter, to insure complete capture of severed tissue.

We claim:

1. A method for cutting body tissue, the method comprising:

- (a) inserting a catheter into a body, and guiding the catheter to position a window of the catheter proximate to tissue at a first location within the body;
- (b) with the window so positioned, applying a force against the catheter in a direction to urge the window and a wall portion of the catheter adjacent the window toward and against the selected tissue, to cause the selected tissue to enter the catheter through the window;
- (c) while the selected tissue is within the catheter, simultaneously using a cutting edge to cut tissue in a direction along the window and generating heat near the cutting edge to heat the selected tissue near the cutting edge during cutting, to sever the selected tissue for retention within the catheter;
- (d) without removing the catheter from the body, adjusting the position of the catheter to position the window proximate to additional selected tissue at additional locations within the body; and
- (e) repeating steps (b) and (c) at the additional locations within the body to sever the additional selected tissue.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the window comprises an opening through a wall of the catheter into a compartment within the catheter, and a cartridge is at least partially disposed within the compartment, the cartridge having a cutting edge with a cutting element disposed along the cutting edge, and an energy source operatively coupled to the cutting element.

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3. The method of claim 2, wherein the cartridge is configured to be rotated within the compartment.

4. The method of claim 2, wherein the cartridge is configured to be moved axially within the compartment.

5. The method of claim 2, wherein the energy source comprises a means for generating an electrical current in the cutting edge to heat tissue adjacent the cutting edge at least to a temperature above normal body temperature.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the means for generating an electrical current in the cutting edge include an RF power source, an indifferent electrode, a first conductor connected to the RF power source and to the cutting edge, and a second conductor connected to the RF power source and to the indifferent electrode.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the catheter includes a balloon mounted along the catheter axially aligned with and on the opposite side of the catheter from the window, and applying the force against the catheter comprises inflating the balloon.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the catheter includes at least one flexible band on the opposite side of catheter from the cutting edge and applying the force against the catheter comprises bowing the flexible band.

9. The method of claim 1, further comprising delivering a therapeutic agent to tissue near the window.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the body tissue comprises an obstruction in a body lumen.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the obstruction comprises one or both of atherosclerotic plaque and thrombotic occlusions.

12. The method of claim 10, wherein the body lumen comprises a blood vessel.

13. The method of claim 10, wherein the body lumen comprises a Fallopian tube.

14. The method of claim 10, wherein the obstruction comprises benign prostate hyperplasia.

15. The method of claim 1, wherein the body tissue comprises soft tissue.

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